

LUMC 2019

“Gone Fishin’” Small Group Project

Topic

How can the church help members prioritize worship, Bible study, small groups, and Sunday School when there are so many distractions in today’s world?

Guiding Scripture

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; don’t rely on your own intelligence. Know Him in all your paths, and He will keep your ways straight.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 (CEB)

Team Members

Tava Kirk; Bethel UMC, Stockbridge
Don Scheck; Bethany UMC, Jefferson
Mary Stamper-Murray; Hoosier Memorial UMC, Fairburn
Jessica Stewart; Glen Haven UMC, Decatur
Doris Wyatt; Moore’s Chapel, Carrollton
Susan Young; Greensboro First UMC, Greensboro

General Information

Worship

In the context of this report, *worship* is not only the corporate worship of God but also our personal worship through several means. At times, our needs in worship change due to human conditions.

From the very beginning of creation, these changes interfered with relationships between God and man, which then can lead to less priority on worship. Therefore, the first point to consider for prioritizing worship is expectation of the worship experience.

Years ago, there was a saying, “What would Jesus do?” This is something we should continue to ask ourselves today. What is expected of us as we participate in the worship experience?

The following are some guidelines we can consider:

- Honor and praise God for His grace, mercy and love.
- Glorify Him for giving us the greatest gift we will ever receive.
- Thank Him for giving His life on the cross for our sins so that we may have eternal life.
- Keep faith with God – it makes us stronger and enables us to stay on the path to everlasting life with Him.
- Worship Him in a manner that honors Him as our Creator and His Son as our Savior.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 tells us that we should note the things in which God delights and then order our priorities accordingly. The supreme goal and glory of humanity is to know and enjoy God.

The second point in prioritizing worship is engagement in worship.

How can we live out God's plan, transform the lives of others, and make them disciples of Him if we are not engaged and living and working His mission? We all have twenty-four hours in a day. Let's take a moment and consider how we can use this time:

- 8 hours for our regular vocation
- 8 hours for rest
- 8 hours for helping someone in distress, Bible study, daily devotionals, church, Sunday school and small group activities

As you can see, there is time for the worship of God in our day. We simply need to use the time we have to engage in the worship of God. We, as the church, can help people find the time and motivation by being a role model by how **we** engage. When we show what that engagement does in our lives and show our heartfelt gratitude for His creation and the gifts He bestows on us, we are glorifying our Lord and Savior and perhaps drawing others to prioritize **their** engagement.

The third point in prioritizing worship is encounter in worship.

One meaning of the word "encounter" is "to meet someone." Therefore, we can reasonably assume that to prioritize worship, we must first meet God in worship. Here are some suggestions on how we might accomplish that objective:

- Study the Bible - God has provided a guide, a roadmap, a blueprint to help us meet Him, the Holy Bible. Inside is the history of our beginnings, God's mission, rules to live by, and the ways in which we should fulfill His mission.

- Pray – As we prepare to encounter God, prayer is another way of making us ready for any great or important endeavor.
- Seek God’s will – Make sure our thoughts, words and deeds are in line with God’s will. We should take great efforts to ensure that we are honoring God and not ourselves.

In summary, since the beginning of creation, God has wanted only one thing from man - a personal relationship with him and for man to worship Him. If we can help our church members prioritize their expectations, their engagement, and their encounter with God, then perhaps we will leave behind the temptations that shift our priorities away from God and worship.

Matthew 7:7-8 – “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Family Focus

One of the ways we explored this topic of prioritizing discipleship in a culture of “too much” is by focusing on the family. For our purposes, family focus means prioritizing a cross-generational approach with activities that appeals to both children and youth and their parents/guardians. This would include activities that would motivate parents/guardians to stay with the children and youth rather than just “dropping off and picking up.” Family focus emphasizes prioritizing the family unit in all worship services.

Suggestions include:

- 1. Create opportunities for families to stay together to worship, grow, and learn about God together, such as family Sunday worship experiences.**
Such opportunities could include communion, prayers said aloud with the whole church, worship songs that everyone knows and can sing or learn, and a sermon that is appropriate for all ages. The worshippers would include parents, caregivers, children, and other family relatives. This type of service could be held once a month, quarterly, or whatever frequency that works for the particular church congregation.
- 2. Create an Intergenerational Sunday School class.**
This class would be open to persons of all ages, gender, color, and national origin. This would create an environment where different opinions and perspectives are shared by the participants. It should be a safe space where

trust becomes an integral part and all input is valued. Small groups seem to be more effective in this setting so that participants share across generations.

Rather than using the traditional “Sunday School” books, select Biblical-based books (ex: “A Perfect Mess,” by Lysa TerKuerst) and books by Christian authors that strengthen the teachings of the Bible while also relating to current practical matters. Encourage participants to recommend books to be used. This type of setting also serves to develop relationships among church members.

3. Create a quarterly spiritual growth and personal development program for young men and women.

The target audience would be young people between the ages of 18 and 35. These classes could be by gender or combined. Family focus would include all family units in this age group rather than just the “traditional definition” of family. This could be a Saturday morning workshop with food and casual attire, and a nursery provided for childcare. This would be a time for young adults to have a time just to learn how to align Biblical truths to their practical lives. Suggested topics could include Faith and God’s Grace, Time Management, and Self-Reflections.

In summary, when the church begins to offer opportunities that add value for its families, the families begin to prioritize, and the church becomes a higher priority in their lives.

Small Groups

A Working Definition: A group of people who gather together on a regular basis with the goal of becoming more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ; to attend to the ways that God is at work in their lives and the extent to which they are cooperating with God’s grace; and, to watch over one another in love and to mutually challenge, support, and encourage one another in the pursuit of deeply committed Christian discipleship.” (Kevin M. Watson, Assistant Professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies at Candler School of Theology)

According to the original Wesley literature, the early Methodist movement had three types of small groups designed to help people become better followers of Jesus Christ. These groups were *in addition to, not in place of*, regular

church attendance. (<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/wesleys-small-group-model-for-today>)

The groups were defined as follows:

- **Society Meeting:** largest of the gatherings; met weekly to hear preaching and teaching from John Wesley, Francis Asbury, or another early leader
- **Class Meeting:** small group of about a dozen; met weekly and asked the question, “How is it for your soul?” Attendance in a class was mandatory to be included in the Society Meetings.
- **Band Meeting:** very small group of about 5 people who would meet to discuss their successes, temptations, and failures to one another; not every Methodist was part of a Band.

There are groups that are small...and then there are small groups. In our project, we focused on the Wesleyan class meeting model. They were meant to provide support, encouragement, and maturation through openness, love, and accountability. The question is always, “How are things with your soul?” Leaders model this by sharing their spiritual triumphs, but also, their failures from the week. This openness ideally allows members to do the same. The group listens, loves and holds one another accountable.

One way we believe the church can prioritize the spiritual practices of its members is to be very intentional with how we formulate small groups. Specifically, we looked at the Home Cell model. This is a small group setup that often happens inside the home of one of the members. This model offers intentional relationships outside the church building and encourages a sense of comfort, or “homeliness.” It is ideal because it can be flexible in terms of scheduling. It can take place every Tuesday at 7 p.m., for example; or, it might meet every Saturday at 3 pm, or every Sunday at 5 p.m. It is up to the church and, more importantly, the small group and its facilitator, to decide a day, time and schedule.

Small groups are not “social clubs” or groups that meet simply to gather and chat. Their purpose, generally, is connected with growing their relationship with God.

In helping people prioritize small groups, we have to think about how to publicize small groups. Some of the prevalent suggestions we found in discussions and literature were through the printed bulletin, church website and other social media outlets the church uses. Also effective in some communities is outreach through flyers and handouts strategically placed around the church and in the community.

Another suggestion was to plan a “kick-off” event that resembles a mini-conference with a dynamic speaker to attract attendance; then at the event, have groups or tables set up to register people for the upcoming small group start-ups.

Prioritizing also means knowing who you’re trying to reach. Tony Morgan, in his book, “The Unstuck Church,” talks about recognizing your target audience – your customer – and “marketing” to them in the way that will attract them. He says, “Take a look at everything you are doing or saying. Does it reflect that target audience?” (p. 24).

Additionally, an important aspect in helping people prioritize is to consider the “Ministry Menu” – what is going on in the church at a given time in the week, month, year, or as an ongoing event? Examples might be things like choir practice, as something that is ongoing, to committee meetings that may be monthly or bi-monthly, to Easter Egg Hunts, that are clearly once a year.

Tony Morgan says “churches freely admit they’re over-programmed. They know they’re trying to do too much.” (p. 132). Even if you create something **new** that looks **really** good, if the ministry menu is too crowded, then people have to determine how many things they can “juggle.” They will then think, “How can I possibly fit this in?”

A key to small group success and growth might be not what we start, but what we stop. Canceling things that are no longer effective allows the church to direct energy to the things that lead to healthy growth, and then good things can happen.

In short, small groups can provide a connection to the church for people who do not attend Sunday School or for those who may not be able to attend worship on Sundays due to work commitments or other involvements.

Resources

Worship

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Family Focus

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Personal Interviews

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- Rev. Gary D. Dean, Senior Pastor, Hoosier Memorial United Methodist Church
- Rev. Dr. Edward J. Landrum, Senior Pastor, Moore's Chapel United Methodist Church
- Ms. Sherrie Wilson, Lay Leader, Hoosier Memorial United Methodist Church
- Dr. Belinda White, Intergenerational Sunday School, Hoosier Memorial United Methodist Church
- Members and Administrative Board, Moore's Chapel United Methodist Church
- Rome-Carrollton Board of Laity

Small Groups

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Personal Interviews/Correspondence

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- Reverend Hugh Hendrickson, Associate Pastor, Greensboro First United Methodist Church, Greensboro, GA
- Larry Bowers, Lay Leader, Greensboro First United Methodist Church, Greensboro, GA
- Lee & Debbie Clark, Laity/Members, Trinity United Methodist Church, Augusta, GA

Personal Interviews – Tava Kirk (for Introductory material)

- Reverend Dr. Candy Thacker, Senior Pastor, Bethel United Methodist Church, Stockbridge, GA
- Reverend Dr. Jay Hodges (Ret), First United Methodist Church, Milledgeville, GA; Interim appointment, Senior Pastor, Peachtree City United Methodist Church, Peachtree City, GA
- Joe Everidge, Lay Leader, Bethel United Methodist Church, Stockbridge, GA